

The EPP and Null Subjects in Romance

Michelle Louise Sheehan

B.A. Oxon (2001)

M.A. York (2002)

Submitted to the department of English Literature, Language and
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This dissertation assesses how null subjects in Romance might be accounted for in a Minimalist framework. It is argued, contra Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998) and Barbosa (1995), that Romance null subject languages (NSLs) have an active EPP of the ‘merge XP’ type, and that agreement morphology in said languages is the *uninterpretable*, PF realisation of valued phi-features on I. Evidence for this claim comes from (i) the behaviour of preverbal subjects, (ii) restrictions on possible word orders, and (iii) evidence for the existence of null expletives/locatives.

An examination of word order possibilities in different pragmatic contexts shows that, invariably, SVO is ‘unmarked’. A slight complication comes from Spanish, which allows VSO order in such contexts, only where another XP surfaces preverbally. As such, it appears to be the case that spec IP is obligatorily filled in Romance NSLs. In short, ‘free inversion’ is not the result simply of verb movement to the I-domain, rather it is either; (i) a form of locative inversion, (ii) expletive-associate inversion, or (iii) the product of prosodic interface conditions.

Null referential subjects, it is proposed, are derived via deletion under non-distinctness in the phonological component. In NSLs, the head I bears an uninterpretable [uD] feature (Roberts 2004), and assuming that valued formal features have the same status as PF-features for the phonological component, the featural make-up of a pronominal subject is a subset of that of I.

Finally, Brazilian Portuguese (BP) is discussed. While BP is not an NSL, it does license null expletive, locative, generic and bound embedded subjects. It is argued that the limited availability of null subjects in BP is because: (i) spec IP need not be PF-visible, and (ii) subjects raise to a topic position in BP, a Topic prominent language. Once again, null subjects are the result of deletion/null spellout in the phonological component.